

VZCZCXYZ0001  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLP #1577/01 3351732  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 011732Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0126  
INFO RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION  
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0031  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0012  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001577

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/01  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: ELECTION MONITORS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

REF: 09 LA PAZ 131; 09 LA PAZ 115

DERIVED FROM: DSCG 05-1 B, D

¶1. (C) Summary: In meetings on November 24 and 25 with representatives from the OAS, European Union, and Carter Center electoral observation missions, all told us they were prepared for the December 6 elections and identified potential pitfalls, including the practice of "public voting," inappropriate use of public funds in campaigning, fraud allegations, and the pending "conditional" status of several hundred thousand voters. Despite these issues, each group praised the work of the National Electoral Court (CNE) and assessed that the elections would be found "free and fair." End summary.

OAS, EU, Carter Center Missions Prepared

¶2. (C) Charge and Embassy officers met separately with OAS Election Observation Mission Deputy Director Rebecca OmaCla, European Union (EU) Chief of Election Observation Mission Renate Weber, and Carter Center Regional Deputy Director Santiago Mariani on November 24 and 25 to discuss their preparations for the upcoming December 6 national elections.

¶3. (C) OmaCla said the OAS would place approximately 125 observers in all nine departments, including rural and urban areas. The observers would come from 16 OAS countries and two observer countries, including 10 observers from the United States. She noted the number of U.S. team members was "up" compared with the January constitutional referendum, "when the situation between Bolivia and the U.S. was tense." OmaCla observed both the August 2008 recall referendum and the January constitutional referendum, and predicted that past denunciations of "public voting" (Reftel B) and voter fraud would likely surface again. Public voting refers both to a traditional practice of collective vote casting based on community consensus and also to a newer practice in which votes are obtained through payments or threats. To better understand the character and extent of public voting -- and whether it is more of a "cultural" or a "coercive" practice -- OmaCla said the OAS would station observers in areas where voter turnout in the past had reached 100 percent or where 100 percent had voted for President Morales. She also voiced concern over potential violence as well as the misuse of public funds by both sides.

¶4. (C) OmaCla said her team had had met with opposition presidential candidate Samuel Doria Medina, a representative of opposition presidential candidate Manfred Reyes Villa, and other opposition electoral experts to discuss potential fraud issues. All had raised fraud concerns but none submitted formal accusations or provided evidence of such activities. (Note: The media reported on December 1 that Reyes Villa's campaign claims to have "proof" that each of the 174 registration stations used to construct the biometric register was "pre-loaded" with 3000 false names, or 522,000 fake voters in total. End note.) OmaCla expressed her admiration for the National Electoral Court's (CNE) performance in quickly constructing the new biometric electoral register, saying opinion polls now showed much greater public confidence in the electoral register. She said her team was monitoring the ongoing issue of the 400,000 voters placed in "conditional" status by the CNE (see below for discussion), but that she believed it would not put the election's result in doubt.

¶5. (C) In a separate meeting with the Charge on November 25, EU Electoral Observation Mission Chief Renate Weber echoed some of OmaCla's concerns while remaining positive overall regarding the prospect of "free and fair" elections. Weber led the EU's observation of the January constitutional referendum and was more critical in her final report than either the OAS or Carter Center (Reftel A). She praised the CNE's work on the electoral register and on election preparations generally. Weber said her team is monitoring Bolivian radio, TV, and press to assess their election coverage, adding that most of the Bolivian press is notoriously partisan. She also voiced concern about politicization of the judiciary, noting the proliferation of criminal investigations of

Reyes Villa since the campaign's start. In a press conference on November 26, Weber called for greater transparency in Bolivia's campaign financing system, decrying the lack of regulations in this area.

¶6. (C) Weber said the EU's electoral mission had 130 members, including a core team of nine experts that had been in Bolivia since October 26, 34 long-term observers that had been stationed for three weeks, and an additional 76 short-term observers that would arrive within the week. The long-term observer team will remain into January, with a final report to be published in February 2010. Weber added that she would give a personal report on December 8. She said some officers from European embassies in La Paz would be accredited through the EU mission, and that seven members of the European Parliament would also come to observe the election.

¶7. (C) Carter Center Deputy Director Santiago Mariani told the Charge on November 24 that the Center would also observe the December 6 elections, but noted that they had focused their resources on observing the voter registration process. He said the Carter Center would publish a preliminary report on the registration process before the elections, and that the tone of the report would be positive. Like OAS Deputy Director OmaCla, Mariani was effusive in his praise for the CNE, saying their work had restored popular confidence in the CNE and had reasserted the institution's independence.

¶8. (C) For the elections, Mariani said the Carter Center has three two-person teams of long-term observers in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, and Chuquisaca. An additional seven to nine short-term observers will arrive just before the elections. He believed most of the short-term observers would be located in La Paz, but added that they would try to coordinate with the OAS and EU efforts to maximize coverage.

¶9. (C) Mariani stated that he was struck by the imbalance in campaign funding between the ruling MAS party and the opposition. Mariani noted that in a visit to heavily-contested Pando, he saw approximately 150 people busily working in the MAS election headquarters and only two people in Manfred Reyes Villa's center.

"Conditional" Voters No Longer Threat

¶10. (SBU) Despite their unanimous praise for the CNE's accomplishments, all three voiced concern regarding the CNE's announcement that 400,671 registered voters were in danger of being

removed from the electoral register. On November 24, just eleven days before elections, CNE President Antonio Costas announced that out of the 5.2 million registered voters (some two million more than existed on the previous electoral roll), over 400,000 names did not appear to have a corresponding birth certificate in the civil registry. Costas said these voters would have until December 3 to appear at a district electoral court with their birth certificate or they would be taken off the rolls.

¶11. (U) Costas' statement set off a political firestorm. Defense Minister Walker San Miguel threatened legal action against the CNE for preventing citizens -- in their opinion likely poorer people in rural areas (i.e. members of the MAS base) -- from exercising their constitutional right to vote. The opposition, led by Congresswoman Ninoska Lazarte, called for the immediate removal of all of the "conditional" voters, claiming the CNE's database check had merely identified the part of the old voter roll that the government had fraudulently inflated (i.e. by issuing identity cards without proof, potentially to foreigners) to increase support for the MAS.

¶12. (C) None of the electoral mission representatives said the issue of the conditional voters would significantly change the outcome of the elections. On November 30, local media reported that well over 200,000 of the voters already had been restored to the rolls. While many people presented their birth certificates,

the CNE also restored all persons born before 1940 and thousands of women who were mistakenly included when their married names did not agree with the name on their birth certificate. The MAS quickly announced they would not take legal action against the CNE. In contrast, both opposition candidates continued to demand immediate removal of all 400,000. The Carter Center told us the error reflected weaknesses in the GOB bureaucracy, not fraud or malfeasance by either the CNE or the government. The quick restoration of more than half of the voters makes it even less likely the issue will affect the validity of the elections.

Comment

¶13. (C) Despite the good efforts of the CNE and the election monitoring missions, there will almost certainly be accusations of fraud, coerced voting, and other irregularities soon after election results are announced. Still, we do not believe such occurrences will greatly affect the election results, as most polls show Morales and his ruling MAS party ahead by a wide margin. We will remain in close contact with the various observation missions as the election unfolds.

Creamer